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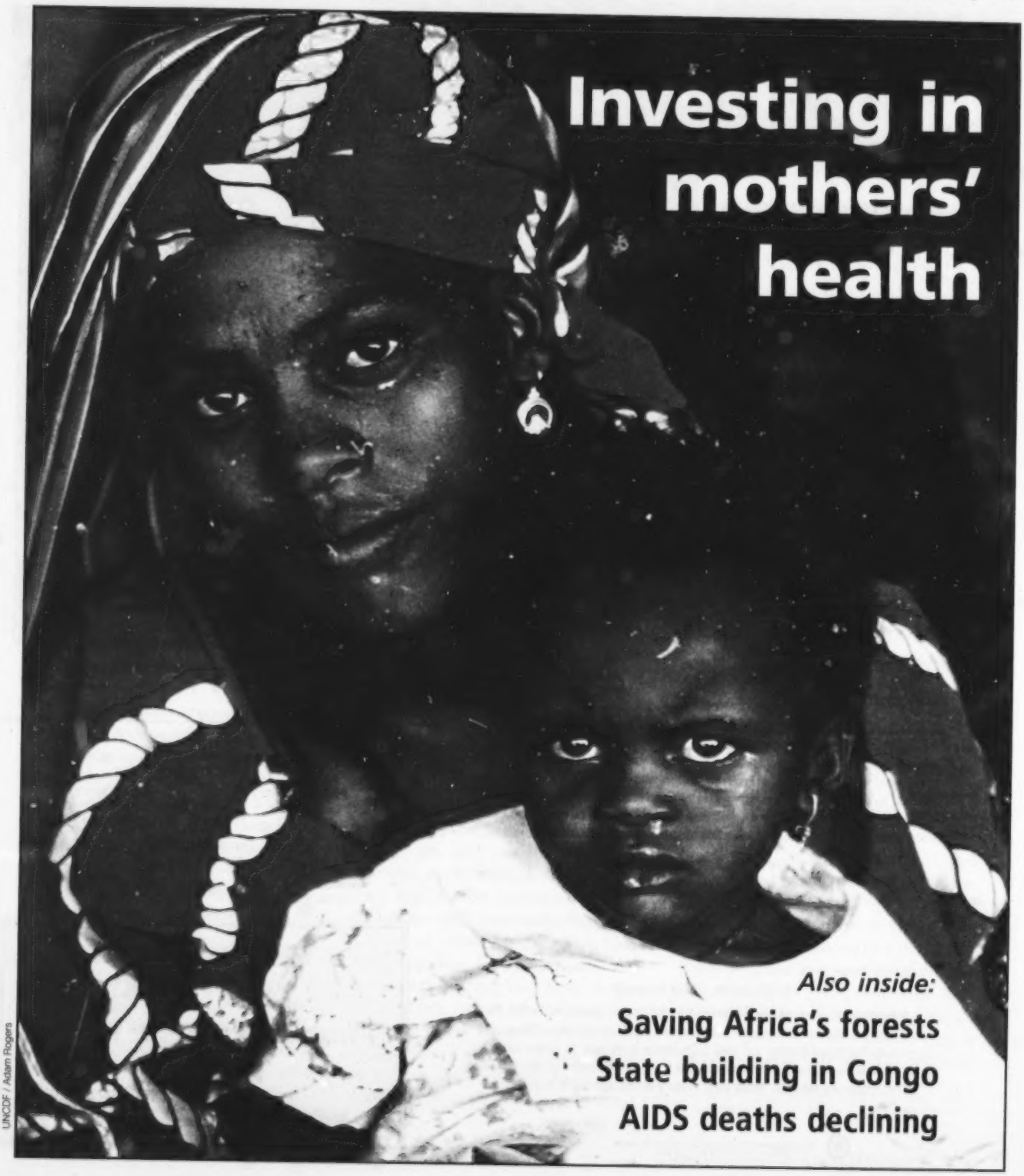

Investing in mothers' health

Also inside:

Saving Africa's forests

State building in Congo

AIDS deaths declining

UNICDF / Adam Rogers

contents

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Cover article

Investing in the health of Africa's mothers..... 8

Social hurdles to better maternal health..... 10

Photo: (Courtesy Pathfinder)

A pregnant woman gets medicine and advice at a rural clinic in Kenya.

Also in this issue

A bank in every African pocket? 3

AIDS deaths are declining, reports UN 4

Saving Africa's forests, the 'lungs of the world'..... 5

Building a state for the Congolese people 12

Armed groups in eastern Congo..... 14

A cleaner bureaucracy, a fuller treasury 17

Departments

Agenda 22

Books 22

Briefs 23

Watch 24

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A bank in every African pocket?

Mobile phones expand access to financial services

By ***Mary Kimani***
Kigali

Ann Wanjiku walks up to a green-and-white booth with an "M-Pesa agent" sign on it. There she shows the agent her identity card and her cell phone, which displays a PIN number provided by a client. Using the PIN number, the M-Pesa agent takes just a minute to verify that the client has transferred payment for 1,000 traditional carvings into Ms. Wanjiku's mobile money account. Ms. Wanjiku then withdraws the amount in cash.

Like 90 per cent of Kenyans, Ms. Wanjiku does not have an account in a regular bank. Across Africa, only 20 per cent of families have formal bank accounts, according to a World Bank survey. In Tanzania the percentage is as low as 5 per cent, and in Liberia 15 per cent.

But the proliferation of mobile telephone services around the continent has opened a new way to extend financial services to people like Ms. Wanjiku. In the few countries where they have emerged, companies such as M-Pesa can use any phone or phone card to provide affordable services to customers wherever there is a mobile phone signal.

Expanding such innovations in the use of modern information and communications technologies (ICT) more widely was a central topic at a Connect Africa Summit held in Kigali, Rwanda, in October. More than 1,000 private-sector, government and donor representatives discussed how such technologies can help in finding solutions to Africa's development problems.

Money under mattresses

Most banks in Africa have branches only in urban areas. Brian Richardson, the chief executive officer of Wizzit South Africa, a cell phone banking facility, notes that expanding access to rural areas has traditionally involved opening new branch offices. "As long as you have that mind-set," he says, "it becomes incredibly expensive to bring banking to the mass market."

As a result, regular bank services are often simply unavailable. Ethiopia has just one bank branch for every 100,000 people, compared with Spain, which has 96 branches for every 100,000 people. Moreover, requirements to maintain relatively high account balances make such services too costly for most Africans.

Alamy Images / Greenstock Photographic Library

In South Africa, Kenya and other countries, cell phones can be used to bring financial services to people who have little access to regular banks.

Even in South Africa, which has a more extensive banking system, it is estimated that people keep about R12 bn (US$1.8 bn) "under mattresses," says Mr. Richardson. "If we could take just a small portion of that into the formal banking system, the impact on the economy would be enormous."

Established in 2004, Wizzit has signed up 50,000 South African customers. It hopes to reach 16 million others, in a country where some 60 per cent of the population has no bank account. Holders of Wizzit accounts can use any cell phone, even the cheap, old models popular in low-income communities. Users can deposit cash into their cell-based accounts through any post office or any branch of Amalgamated Banks of South Africa or the South African Bank of Athens. Salaries can be paid electronically into a Wizzit account. Account holders also receive Maestro debit cards accepted at ATMs and by retailers. There is no minimum balance or annual fee, but users pay the equivalent of US$0.15–0.78 per transaction.

According to Mohsen Khalil, the World Bank's director of global ICT, Wizzit's operation is one of the most innovative approaches to mobile banking, since it specifically targets the poor. If this model works in South Africa, he says, the World Bank will help the company expand coverage within and beyond the country. "We may be looking here at . . . the most effective way to provide social and economic services to the poor."

Touch of a button

Some counterparts to Wizzit have emerged elsewhere in Africa. Like Ms. Wanjiku, about 1 million Kenyans use M-Pesa, a joint product of the Vodafone/Safaricom mobile phone company, the Commercial Bank of Africa and Faulu Kenya, a microfinance organization. M-Pesa customers deposit money with a registered agent or phone vendor. The agent then credits the phone account. Users can send between 100 Kenyan shillings ($1.5) and 35,000 shillings ($530) via a text message to a desired recipient — even someone using a different mobile network. The recipient

see page 21

AIDS deaths are declining, reports UN

But new data show that epidemic remains huge in Africa

By **Ernest Harsch**

For the first time since the AIDS pandemic was identified a quarter-century ago, "we are seeing a decline in global AIDS deaths," reports Dr. Kevin De Cock, director of AIDS at the World Health Organization (WHO). Revised figures released by WHO and the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) also show that new infections from HIV, the virus that causes the disease, have begun to fall as well.

Citing more accurate data-collection methods, the *AIDS Epidemic Update 2007*, released jointly by UNAIDS and WHO in November, estimates that there are about 33.2 million people worldwide living with HIV, compared with the figure of 39.5 million the two institutions had released the year before. The change in the number of people living with HIV was not an actual decline, the *Update* hastened to add, but a statistical revision of estimates after detailed national surveys in about 30 countries demonstrated that earlier totals were too high.

The revision generated considerable controversy, with some independent AIDS experts arguing that the data should have been adjusted earlier. But all agree that the newer, more accurate figures have brought into the open an important shift in the epidemic's progression, one that was not apparent with the older statistics.

In adjusting their overall estimates retroactively, to previous years, the two UN institutions revealed some positive trends over time. First, new infections with HIV were likely to have peaked in the late 1990s, when more than 3 million people became newly infected annually. The revised estimates indicate that this total has actually been declining since then, to some 2.5 million newly infected in 2007. Second, the number of annual deaths from AIDS has also started to fall, from a high point of around 2.4 million in 2005 to about 2.1 million in 2007.

To an extent, these changing trends reflect some of the first significant successes in AIDS-prevention efforts. In a number of countries, according to national survey results, young people are engaging in less risky sexual behaviour, whether by using protective condoms or by having fewer or no partners. The report cites evidence of such behavioural changes in Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe and a few other countries.

Peter Arnold, Inc. / Neil Cooper

Young woman promoting AIDS awareness in Swaziland: Southern Africa remains the most severely afflicted region.

AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa
millions, 2007

People living with HIV	22.5
of which: women	13.7
of which: children	2.2
People newly infected with HIV	1.7
AIDS deaths	1.6
AIDS orphans	11.4

Source: UN Africa Renewal from data in UNAIDS, WHO, AIDS Epidemic Update 2007.

'Real nightmares' in Africa

Neither the shift in the disease's overall trend nor the revision in the estimates has changed one glaring fact: sub-Saharan Africa remains the epicentre of the global malady. Of all those living with HIV, about 22.5 million, or 68 per cent of the world's total, are in sub-Saharan Africa. The region accounts for the same percentage of people newly infected with the virus, as well as 76 per cent of those who die of AIDS annually.

"AIDS continues to be the single largest cause of mortality in sub-Saharan Africa," says the report. Moreover, in contrast to other world regions, women and children are far more vulnerable to the disease in sub-Saharan Africa. Of those Africans living with HIV, 61 per cent are women, while fully 90 per cent of all HIV-positive children in the world are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Within the continent, Southern Africa is by far the most afflicted, accounting for around a third of all new HIV infections globally and about a third of people living with HIV. In eight countries — Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe — national adult HIV-prevalence rates exceed 15 per cent. South Africa leads the world in the number of people infected with HIV.

Southern African countries, says Daniel

see page 19

Saving Africa's forests, the 'lungs of the world'

Forest conservation can help counter climate change

By **Michael Fleshman**

Agent of the World Wildlife Fund monitors commercial logging operations in Gabon to ensure minimal damage to the forest habitat.

From the air the forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) stretch as far as the eye can see, broken only by distant, shining ribbons of rivers and streams. Dense, deep, seemingly impenetrable, the forests of the Central African region extend over 200 mn hectares, inspiring awe and sometimes dread among residents and visitors, and providing refuge for everything from rare and endangered plants and animals to ferocious militias accused of brutal crimes against humanity.

It is difficult to imagine that such vast ancient woodlands are at risk of extinction. But they are disappearing at an alarming rate. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), indigenous (also known as "old-growth") forests in Africa are being cut down at a rate of more than 4 mn hectares per year — twice the world's deforestation average. According to the FAO, losses totalled more than 10 per cent of the continent's total forest cover between 1980 and 1995 alone.

Saving Africa's forests from the chainsaw and axe of encroaching humanity is essential to the health and productivity of much of the continent's economy, experts point out. They cite the forests' roles as watersheds, defences against soil erosion and regulators of local weather conditions.

Trees trap 'greenhouse gases'

But the fate of the forests could also spell the difference between success and failure in the race against global warming. Trees, the dominant inhabitants of the diverse and complex ecological systems called forests, are among the world's largest and most efficient living storehouses of carbon monoxide, the "greenhouse gas" most responsible for the earth's temperature rise and changes in the planet's climate (see *Africa Renewal* July 2007).

Through a chemical process known as photosynthesis, trees and many other plants absorb carbon from the air and combine it with sunlight to generate the energy they need for life. Trees convert the carbon gas into solid form, store it in their trunks, branches and leaves, and release oxygen back into the atmosphere. Because they take carbon from the atmosphere and produce oxygen, forests are often referred to as "the lungs of the world." Carbon dioxide is generated primarily by the burning of oil, coal, natural gas and other "fossil" fuels for industry, power generation and transportation.

Preserving Africa's surviving tropical forests and planting new trees to replace those lost to deforestation could help reduce the severity of climate change by absorbing more carbon from the air, and ease the local impact of climate change by regulating local weather conditions.

But an even greater argument for protecting the forests is the role of deforestation in causing global warming. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), between 20 and 25 per cent of all annual carbon dioxide emissions are caused by the practice of burning forests to clear the land for farming — more than is caused by the entire world transportation sector. Burning trees and brush releases the stored carbon back into the atmosphere.

Poor forest management policies — including unrestricted logging, excessive harvesting of firewood and medicinal plants, and road construction — contribute to the problem, as do drought, flooding, forest fires and other natural disasters. The collection of wood for heating and cooking and for making charcoal is a particular problem in Africa, since wood supplies about 70 per cent of domestic energy needs, a significantly higher percentage than in the rest of the world.

Estimates of the total amount of carbon stored in the forests vary greatly. One estimate, based on research by the UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), put the total at about 1,000 bn tonnes, or about 166 years' worth of current global carbon emissions. Africa contains about 15 per cent of the world's remaining forests and is second only to South America in the amount of the dense tropical forests that are the most effective in removing carbon from the atmosphere. The vast forests of the DRC alone are estimated to contain as much as 8 per cent of all the carbon stored in the

earth's vegetation.

The conversion of forest land to agriculture, both subsistence and commercial, is by far the most common and most destructive cause of deforestation in Africa and other tropical regions. As demand for farmland grows in response to population pressures, millions of hectares of tropical forests are being put to the torch in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

"It is generally accepted," the FAO noted in a 2000 report on sustainable forestry in Africa, "that the key to arresting deforestation and to implementing sustainable forest development lies in improved technologies for food production."

Improving the productivity of African agriculture is a top priority for African governments and features prominently in the continent's development agenda, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). But transforming the poorly financed and long-neglected agricultural sector is a costly, difficult and long-term goal (see *Africa Renewal* July 2006). Reform therefore appears unlikely to progress quickly enough to prevent further severe losses to the continent's woodlands.

In the meantime, improving governments' ability to manage their forest resources, expanding reforestation programmes and changing public perceptions and economic calculations about the value of existing forests could be the key to the survival of Africa's deep woods.

Countries with the largest forested areas

mn hectare, 2005

Russian Federation	809
Brazil	478
Canada	310
US	303
China	197
Australia	164
Congo, Democratic Republic	134
Indonesia	88
Peru	69
India	68
Others	1,333

Source: UN Africa Renewal from Food and Agriculture Organization data

Forests and people

The challenges are formidable. Humanity has long appreciated forests for the energy, food and medicine they provide, and as a source of wood products for construction and other purposes. But the role of forests in supporting agriculture, preserving biodiversity, protecting water supplies and moderating the impact of climate change are less well understood. The UN estimated that in 2000 some 1.6 billion people around the world, including many of the world's poorest, derived at least part of their food, income or medical needs directly from the forest. Of those, some 70 million indigenous people depend on the forests for much of their livelihoods.

Africa's rural poor are particularly dependent on its forests. Although forest products, primarily unfinished logs, account for only about 2 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's exports, forests generate an average of 6 per cent of the region's gross domestic product — triple the world average. Eighteen African countries, including Cameroon and Ghana, are among the 24 countries worldwide that rely on forests for 10 per cent or more of their economies.

Although environmentalists and advocacy groups have brought international attention to unsustainable, and often illegal, logging in Central and West Africa, about half of all the wood extracted from Africa's forests is used domestically as fuel. Despite the enormous losses to deforestation, the region is a net importer of processed wood products.

The perception of indigenous forests as a reservoir of unused land and a safety net for bad times is understandable, UNEP forestry expert Christian Lambrechts told *Africa Renewal*. "People have to rely on the forest to gain access to specific products they can't buy on the market," he says. "They have no cash. They can't go to the chemist. They have to go to the forest to extract medicinal plants."

Such "subsistence" exploitation of the forests is inevitable in areas of high poverty and causes no damage when done sustainably, Mr. Lambrechts notes. But when

Without the community, a carbon discredit

It must have seemed like a good idea back in 1994, when a non-profit agency established by Dutch power companies contracted with the Ugandan government to reforest an area on the edge of Uganda's Mount Elgon National Park. The companies expected to offset their European greenhouse gas emissions by planting pollution-absorbing trees, and to give Uganda a greener park that had been damaged by human encroachment during years of civil conflict. But a farming community already occupied the land, and its members were not consulted. Paramilitary park rangers forcefully evicted some 500 families to make room for the trees. They burned homes, assaulted residents and refused to provide alternative land or compensation as required by law.

While the Dutch non-profit went on to plant over half a million trees in subsequent years, the former residents fought back, filing a legal challenge against the evictions and petitioning for return of the land. When a Ugandan court ruled in the community's favour and ordered the government to redraw the park boundaries, the community members returned to their former farms. They chopped down the trees and sowed maize and beans among the stumps. All the carbon offsets awarded to the Dutch companies were lost and the non-profit agency has suspended further plantings in the area until the dispute is definitively resolved.

To critics of the carbon-offset market, the Mount Elgon fiasco is a textbook example of just how badly wrong such projects can go. For UN Environment Programme expert Christian Lambrechts, it is a lesson in the importance of recognizing the legitimate interests of neighbouring communities and actively involving them in forestry programmes. Although consultation does not guarantee success, he says, it can head off confrontation. "Once the local community gets a little bit empowered and realizes their stake," he notes, "it becomes their forest."

large numbers of people are forced to use forests for food and fuel, "it has a local impact on the degradation of the forests."

Valuing forests, not the trees

Changing the way governments and people value forests, Mr. Lambrechts says, is critical to the survival of those forests. Although the market can price the value of tree plantations and reforestation programmes intended as renewable sources of timber and fuel, he explains, it is not good at determining the value of old-growth forests, which provide a range of vital, but less tangible, services to the economy.

Kenya's tea plantations, Mr. Lambrechts observes, are a good example of the linkages between indigenous forests and the commercial economy. Tea is a major source of the country's export earnings and the industry enjoys considerable political clout in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, where Mr. Lambrechts is based. "If you look at the plantations, on a map they are all near the major forest areas. This is because tea requires very even temperature and moisture for optimum growth. The forests provide that."

By regulating temperatures and trapping and releasing moisture during the hot dry season, Mr. Lambrechts continues, forests create the climate conditions needed for the quality teas that Kenya sells. "If you don't have the forests you don't have tea." When comparing the cost of preserving the forests to the wealth created by the tea plantations, he says, it makes financial sense for the tea estates to invest in sound forestry and encourage greater government regulation and control of forest resources.

Kenya is similarly reliant on the forests for electricity, over 70 per cent of which is generated by hydroelectric dams fed by mountain forest watersheds. "It is less about finding an exact value for the forests than in calculating the losses if the forests disappear," he explains. "If we apply the payment-for-services principle to all the sectors that receive services from the forest — agriculture, power, water and many others — we might find a good basis for having the private sector be in favour of conservation." As forests dwindle, he notes, both government and the private sector are beginning to realize that forest services can no longer be had for free and must be paid for like other goods and services.

Photo: Kasuwi Chimphondah

Woman with a seedling, as part of a reforestation project in Malawi.

Building an environmental constituency

Enlisting industry can also broaden the political constituency for the forests, Mr. Lambrechts points out. "We are working at getting the private sector to persuade the government to protect some of those sites," he says, noting that lobbying on behalf of stronger enforcement of forestry laws by a range of business interests attracts more notice from policymakers. In the past, he says, only forestry officials would respond to UNEP reports on the health of Kenya's forests. Now they work with officials in the finance ministry and the vice president's office as well, an indication that the importance of the forests to Kenya's overall economic development is more widely appreciated by government. "That is the way to get support from what I would say is the higher decision-making level," he argues. "I believe that is the way forward."

Mr. Lambrechts emphasizes that different kinds of forests provide different kinds of services, and that finding the right match is a vital part of sustainable forestry. Indigenous forests, he says, store more carbon, regulate weather conditions better and contain more and more varied biodiversity than tree plantations and reforested areas.

But reforestation and commercial forestry are also important for creating a renewable source of wood products and a buffer between humanity and the ancient trees. "On the one hand, people have more produce from their existing land and thus less need to go to the indigenous forests to extract the same products. On the other, they are basically establishing agro-forestry practices on land outside of forests and improving the soil quality and other services the land can provide" by using trees to prevent wind and water erosion of topsoil, trap and recycle plant nutrients and provide a renewable source of energy, wood products, animal fodder and other valuable materials to farmers.

'Greed' and deforestation

Preserving and expanding Africa's forests, says UNEP's Mr. Lambrechts, will require a mix of sound forestry practices and greater appreciation of the real financial value of forest eco-systems. But the political dimensions are also important, he maintains.

He notes that in East Africa and other parts of the continent, the main cause of deforestation is no longer local encroachment on forested areas for farmland or high subsistence use, or even for illegal logging. "It is basically illegal settlements. These

see page 20

Investing in the health of Africa's mothers

Many are too poor to survive childbirth

By **Mary Kimani**

Pumwani Maternity Hospital, in Nairobi, Kenya, is the largest maternal health centre in East and Central Africa. Located close to Mathare and Korogocho, two of Nairobi's biggest slums, the hospital helps some 27,000 women give birth each year. Most are poor and young, between the ages of 14 and 18.

The government-run hospital struggles to provide even the most basic services, since it lacks sufficient resources, equipment and staff. "We told patients to buy their own things because of the shortage of supplies," explains Evelyn Mutio, the former head of the hospital's nursing staff. "We told patients to come with gloves, to buy their own syringes, needles, cotton wool and maternity pads."

The Pumwani Maternity Hospital exemplifies the state of the health infrastructure in Africa. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), high service costs, lack of trained staff and supplies, poor transport and patients' insufficient knowledge mean that 60 per cent of mothers in sub-Saharan Africa do not have a health worker present during childbirth. That heightens the risks of complications, contributing to greater maternal and child death and disability.

WHO estimates that in Nigeria, 800,000 women are living with fistula, a disabling condition often caused by problems in childbirth; the number grows by 20,000 each year. In Tanzania, 9,000 women die annually of complications related to pregnancy. Rose Mlay, the Tanzania representative of the White Ribbon Alliance, an international coalition on maternal health, says half of the mothers in the country have no access to medical facilities, because such facilities are too far away and the women lack adequate transport. And, she adds, "Even when attendants are present, they may not always have the training, skills or adequate equipment and facilities."

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) call for reducing the number of women dying during pregnancy and childbirth by three quarters by 2015.

Photo / Gamma Presse

Listening to a mother's foetus in Liberia: African women not only need access to well-equipped health clinics, but also assistance from trained personnel who can recognize and deal with complications.

Health care on bicycles

Despite scarce resources, some countries have been able to find ways to expand access to maternal health care. In Senegal, the Ministry of Health and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) jointly fund the work of community health workers who bicycle to visit women in their villages. They are trained to monitor the health status of pregnant women, refer the women to local heath centres for prenatal checkups and ensure that they get to a centre where skilled attendants can assist with delivery.

"These volunteers come from the populations they serve," says Dr. Suzzane Maiga-Konate, UNFPA's representative in Senegal. "Sensitive questions that people would never ask an outsider, they ask them. And if we can reach people, we can raise the health status of this country."

In addition, UNFPA provides the villages with about $50 in seed money to set up community health funds. Villagers work out among themselves how to replenish the funds, usually through small monthly donations. The funds are used for emergency cases, such as getting a woman to a district hospital when complications arise.

Preventable deaths

Across Africa, the challenge of preventing maternal deaths is enormous. While progress has been made in some countries, the 23 countries in the world with the worst mortality rates in 2006 were all in sub-Saharan Africa. While a pregnant woman in Sweden has only 1 in 30,000 chances of dying, in Sierra Leone the risk is 1 in 7. In 2002, the WHO warned that if nothing is done to improve access to maternal care in Africa, 2.5 million women would die before the end of the decade, and 49 million would be living with disabilities.

Dr. Luc De Bernis, UNFPA's senior advisor on maternal health in Africa, says the problem is the poor state of Africa's health systems. "What is needed is an

effective system" by which women can be assisted during the birth, he told *Africa Renewal*. "We know that 15 per cent of pregnant women develop complications that require obstetric care, and up to 5 per cent will require some type of surgery. We have to invest in the infrastructure necessary to do it."

Dr. Grace Kodindo, a former head of maternity at the main hospital in Ndjamena, the capital of Chad, agrees. "In Africa we have a shortage of qualified staff," she says. "In most of the continent, the ratio is 1 doctor for every 60–80,000 people. We lack equipment and drugs, and there is inadequate coverage in the rural areas."

WHO estimates that three quarters of maternal fatalities and disabilities could be prevented if deliveries were to take place at well-equipped health centres, with suitably trained and skilled staff.

According to Dr. Yves Bergevin, a senior adviser on reproductive health at UNFPA, every woman needs to be near a health centre so she can get advice about nutrition. Such centres should also have trained personnel who can recognize complications and either manage them or quickly refer the woman to a larger hospital. Facilities for emergency surgery or lifesaving blood transfusions must be available. "Even if it is three in the morning an obstetric emergency is not something for which you can tell the mother to come back tomorrow," he told *Africa Renewal*. "If that woman needs but doesn't get a caesarean, then it's very simple: she will die."

Millennium goal

The international community has agreed that bringing down maternal mortality is a priority. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed to by world leaders in September 2000, include a specific target of reducing the number of women dying during pregnancy and childbirth by three quarters by 2015.

Achieving the MDG goals of reducing child and maternal mortality "is one of the most urgent tasks ahead of us," UN Deputy Secretary-General Rose Migiro said in New York in September 2007, at the launch of Deliver Now, a campaign by 80 governments, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aimed at raising the commitment and funds to improve delivery of and access to maternal services.

Shaky commitments

African leaders have also committed themselves to improving health services. At a meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2001, they pledged to put aside 15 per cent of their annual budgets to improve health access. By 2004, only Botswana and Gambia had met that target.

Dr. Kodindo questions African governments' commitment. "Yes, they are poor," she told *Africa Renewal*. "But they have some money. For example, Chad is producing oil, but the money is used to buy arms. Meanwhile maternal mortality is not on the agenda.... We have seen other countries like Honduras and Sri Lanka, which despite poverty have been able to do a lot. Our countries could do it if they really wanted. Maternal mortality is simply not a priority. If it were a priority, they could have put it in the governments' annual budgets."

A related problem, says Dr. De Bernis, is that governments and donor agencies tend to focus on specific themes, such as HIV infection, malaria and tuberculosis, while failing to address the general state of Africa's health care systems. "Strengthening health services to address maternal mortality would be very important for all these programmes," he says.

"A surgery room," he adds, "will not only serve the mothers. It will serve the needs of the community. A road which goes to a health centre will serve the community in other ways. This is a development issue and economists should recognize this. We have never seen any country developing without a minimal health system. What we need is long-term investment, which is not what is being done at present."

Austerity and 'cost sharing'

The poor state of Africa's health sector is partly a legacy of policies pursued in the 1980s and 1990s at the urging of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. To counter the continent's burgeoning debt, corruption and misuse of resources, these international financial institutions prescribed a regimen of reduced domestic spending by African governments that were intended to improve fiscal balances and ensure continued debt payments.

A pregnant woman gets medicine and advice at a rural clinic in Kenya. African governments have pledged to devote at least 15 per cent of their budgets to health, but only a few have reached that target.

However, Dr. Bergevin argues, such

austerity also had the negative effect of reducing funding for health care. Health centres became dilapidated and there was limited hiring of new health workers, especially doctors. Those already on the payroll left in large numbers because of poor pay and bad working conditions. Many doctors emigrated to developed countries. "Africa has never recovered from that," he explains. "While the adjustments were necessary to improve financial discipline, it has had a terrible effect on the health sectors."

In an effort to overcome the decline in government financing, many hospitals and clinics began asking patients to pay more for services. In Kenya, the government introduced "user fees" at public health facilities like Pumwani Maternity Hospital in 1989, as part of a World Bank push for cost-sharing in public services. "We are asking people to die because they can't [afford to] be treated," Dr. Shadrack Ojwang, a gynecologist at the main hospital, was quoted as saying in a joint report by the Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya and the Centre for Reproductive Rights, a US non-profit group. "We can't do anything about this until parliament repeals cost sharing. We went into this blindly. Nobody thought of it properly."

The report by the two groups notes that in the face of the negative impact on health care systems, the World Bank has backed away from promoting user fees. It now supports the provision of less expensive basic health care, including maternal health services.

Unequal impact

But since enough financing is not available to provide free care, many African health facilities remain locked into "cost sharing"

Social hurdles to better maternal health

Even when maternal health facilities are available, expectant mothers in Africa do not always get timely care. A study by the Africa regional office of the World Health Organization (WHO), *Reducing Mortality Rates*, reports that sometimes women or birth attendants "fail to recognize danger signals and are not prepared to deal with them." One answer, argues Dr. Yves Bergevin, senior adviser on reproductive health for the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), is to improve the skills of birth attendants and the knowledge and capacity of women, their families and their communities.

Involving men is important, says Lucy Idoko, the UNFPA's assistant representative in Nigeria. Most men, she says, do not know the risks of going through labour. "Maternal health is not only a woman's issue but also a man's issue, and important to society as a whole."

Cultural practices can also affect women's health risks. WHO cites genital mutilation, early marriage and multiple pregnancies. Women who have undergone infibulation, a form of genital mutilation where the external genitalia are stitched, are more likely to suffer from obstructed labour. UNFPA data show that girls who give birth between the ages of 15 and 20 are twice as likely to die in childbirth as those in their twenties, while girls under 15 are more than five times as likely to die.

"Adolescent girls face the highest risk of premature delivery," says Dr. Grace Kodindo, former chief of maternity at the Ndjamena general hospital in Chad, now working at the maternal mortality programme of Columbia University in New York. "Because their bodies are not yet fully mature, they risk obstructed labour. This is why we encourage young women to postpone their first pregnancy."

Dr. Kodindo argues that both young age and the low status of women in society often leave them with little power to determine if, when and with whom to become pregnant. They also have little choice in the number and timing of their children. "Women should be able to decide the spacing of their children," she told *Africa Renewal*. "But in Africa the woman cannot make this decision freely. Her status in society is often determined by how many children she has, and women often have children even when they don't feel like having more. Many men don't want family planning because they want the status that more children bring."

Alamy Images / Andrew Holt

Young mother in Ethiopia: Girls between the ages of 15 and 20 are twice as likely to die in childbirth as those in their twenties.

In 2004, WHO reported that about 4 mn abortions take place annually in Africa. Since abortion is illegal in most countries, most of these are performed in unsafe conditions, contributing to nearly 30,000 deaths, about 13 per cent of all maternal deaths in Africa.

WHO believes that some 90 per cent of all abortion-related deaths and injuries could be avoided if women who wanted to avoid pregnancies were able to use contraception. Yet overall, less than 25 per cent of African women are able to obtain contraceptives. In West Africa, fewer than 10 per cent can. "If family planning could be made available, we would reduce maternal deaths," says Dr Kodindo.

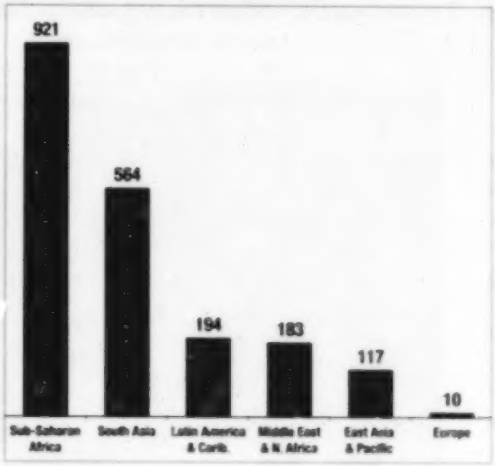
She is optimistic. "We are seeing positive indications. The economic burden of many children is making men more cooperative." Such a shift is especially notable in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Dr. Kodindo observes. "My only regret is that it is only in the urban areas. There is much work to do in the rural areas."

— Mary Kimani

practices. Such a "pay-for-service" model, notes Dr. Bergevin, has had a catastrophic impact on the poor, who cannot afford to pay fees. As a result, they have less access to health care.

The situation at Pumwani Maternity Hospital is typical. Up until May 2007, patients wishing to receive maternal care had to deposit 1,200 Kenya shillings (US$17). Women without the money were turned away. It costs Ksh3,000 for a normal delivery and Ksh6,000 for a caesarean, along with Ksh400 to cover the bed charge for the first day. Daily bed charges of Ksh400 accrue throughout a woman's stay at the hospital. The hospital's fees are low compared to those charged at private facilities, but significant for the 60 per cent of Kenyans who live on less than Ksh140 ($2) a day.

Maternal mortality rates
per 100,000 live births, 2000



Source: UN Africa Renewal from data in World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2006.

In Ethiopia, which has a similar model, a rich woman is 28 times as likely as a poor mother to have a doctor available during delivery, according to the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In Chad and Niger, the gap is 14 times or more.

"We cannot accept systems which do not provide access to everybody," says Dr. De Bernis. "If the poor have no access, we will never reduce maternal mortality in a meaningful way." He notes that charging for services might improve access to medical care for those who can afford it, and thereby reduce the total number of maternal deaths. But leaving the poor behind would be unacceptable. "We need to ensure that maternal mortality reductions are based on reduction of deaths for everyone, rich or poor."

Concerned that high costs were impeding access to maternal health care, Kenya's then Health Minister Charity Ngilu in May 2007 abolished maternity fees in public hospitals such as Pumwani. But the money still has to come from somewhere. Dr. Frida Govedi, the doctor in charge of clinical services at Pumwani, points out that the hospital already struggles to get the limited subsidy it is entitled to from the Nairobi City Council. The council currently owes the hospital Ksh100 mn. Without that amount and without user fees, the hospital simply "can't run," she says.

Dr. Ojwang is a member of a task force set up in 2004 by the government to study the running of the hospital. He notes that the Nairobi City Council has been marked by mismanagement and corruption. "Money was disappearing from the treasury," he explains. Only recently has the hospital begun to gain greater control over the funds.

'Unacceptable'

Across Africa, spending on health remains limited. "Currently sub-Saharan countries are spending less than $2 per person for maternal health," Dr. Bergevin notes. "Most experts agree that you need to spend at least $8. To see a fully functioning health system, you need to spend $40–50 dollars per person, excluding anti-retroviral drugs."

"We cannot accept systems which do not provide access to everybody. If the poor have no access, we will never reduce maternal mortality in a meaningful way."

— Dr. Luc De Bernis, senior adviser, UN Population Fund

Some donors are seeking to bridge the financing gap for maternal health. In October 2007, at the launch of the Deliver Now campaign, Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg announced that his country will give $1 bn over the next decade towards improving maternal health worldwide. He also called for maternal mortality to become a higher priority. "That there is hardly any progress on maternal health is unacceptable," he said. "It is so simple to do something about it. It is cheap and we know what to do. We would never have accepted that kind of a death toll if it was white rich men who were dying. Something would have been done a long time ago. So this is obviously also a question of gender and financial equality."

Mr. Stoltenberg pointed out that while a billion dollars may look like a lot, "it is not much. It is a small fraction of our development aid." Norway's official development assistance is currently 0.97 per cent of its gross domestic product, higher than the international community's agreed goal of 0.7 per cent. The average for all donors is about half that level, however. So, Mr. Stoltenberg argued, much more would become available if donor governments met their promises.

Dr. De Bernis warns that efforts to introduce free health care should not depend entirely on donor assistance. Given the uncertainties of external aid, "this is not sustainable."

But there are other options, he adds. "In West Africa, we have seen examples of useful cost sharing," so that the burden is not placed solely on the patients. "A calculation is made of the health cost, how much the government can afford to provide and the rest of the financial burden is shared with the community," he explains. "This helps improve the quality of care and involves the community. If the ambulance is not working or drugs are not available, the community will ask why." Even in such schemes, the really poor should still be exempted from paying, he argues. "The community has to agree on how to do this."

Despite the challenges, his compatriot, Dr. Bergevin, is optimistic. "We know that maternal mortality can be reduced. We know what to do, and how to do it. Other countries are on track." The biggest challenge lies with 66 countries in the developing world, including 45 in sub-Saharan Africa. "We know it can be done." ■

Building a state for the Congolese people

Beyond peace and elections, fundamental reforms are essential in the DRC

By **Ernest Harsch**
Kinshasa

A pickup truck marked "Delta Protection" zooms around a corner on a main avenue in the heart of the Congolese capital, with two uniformed men in the cab and another standing on the back, swinging a mounted heavy machine gun back and forth. They wear sunglasses, though it is night. On another street, a minivan labeled "African Defence System" bounces along with more than a half-dozen armed personnel.

Such private security outfits are common in the main cities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), hired mostly by foreign and local businesses to protect their property and keep crime at bay. They can be brutal. In front of one of Kinshasa's main banks, a uniformed guard clubs a woman trying to sell bread on the sidewalk.

The government is working to strengthen its regular police forces. But they are not yet able to guarantee public safety. All too often, undisciplined police and soldiers themselves commit abuses.

Across the country and in various activities, the Congolese state and its institutions are only minimally present or effective. Peace agreements ended much of the fighting that devastated the eastern half of this country for nearly a decade — but a number of armed groups continue to operate there, perpetuating insecurity, causing major population displacements and threatening to reignite a wider war (see box, page 14). National elections have put in office a government with some political legitimacy.

Yet reforms of key state organs — police, army, courts, civil administration, state enterprises, local government councils, tax agencies — have only just begun. So have efforts to get the government to open up to dialogue with ordinary citizens.

Riot police guard Supreme Court in Kinshasa. The DRC's court system is in need of serious reform.

'A problem of the state'

For the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), overcoming such weaknesses in state authority is essential for preserving the country's hard-won peace. In addition to their peacekeeping duties, many of MONUC's 18,000 military and police personnel and 2,000 civilian staff are now engaged in helping Congolese build institutions that can manage the country's affairs over the long term, without reverting to crisis and chaos.

"The problem in the Congo is not only the problem of armed groups," observes UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Haile Menkerios. "It is a problem of the state. It is a problem of nation-building.... Institutions do exist on paper right now, [but] in practical terms, they really need quite some time to strengthen." (When he spoke with *Africa Renewal* in Kinshasa, before his current appointment, Mr. Menkerios was the UN Secretary-General's deputy special representative in the DRC.)

Many Congolese share that opinion. "In most areas I visited, the existence of the state is doubtful," Senator Vincent de Paul Lunda Bululu told a Congolese journalist after touring his home region of Haut-Katanga in September. "Certainly, the state exists legally, but in reality it needs to be reborn."

According to Albert Yuma Mulimbi, national president of the Fédération des entreprises du Congo, businesspeople need a "climate of trust" before they will invest and create jobs. Unfortunately, the state is "still fragile." To ensure economic recovery from the ravages of war, says Mr. Yuma, it is important to "reconstruct a strong, impartial, effective state."

Ordinary Congolese often agree. In late June, civil society organizations and professional associations staged a march through the town of Beni, in the highly insecure province of North Kivu, to protest banditry, killings by rebels, rape and extortion. They submitted a memorandum to the interim mayor insisting that the authorities do more to reestablish order.

'Governance contract'

In their public speeches and declarations, the country's political leaders assign a high priority to building up the state's capacities and its public acceptance. Guiding

all official actions, Minister of Planning Olivier Kamitatu told *Africa Renewal*, is a "governance contract that ties the government to the Congolese people."

The government, Mr. Kamitatu says, has pledged action on a variety of fronts. In addition to improving people's living conditions, these include reforming the army, police and courts, cleaning up the government's management of public funds, overhauling the civil service and state administration and carrying out "genuine decentralization" so that political and administrative authority is not concentrated excessively in Kinshasa. "We will be judged" on the basis of such actions, Mr. Kamitatu believes.

The goal is not simply "post-war reconstruction." It is to start building, often for the first time ever, institutions that will genuinely serve the interests of the country's citizens.

The hurdles of state reconstruction in the Congo are not unique. Many other African countries confront similar problems, and they are watching to see how the Congo manages to resolve them. But the challenges in the DRC are particularly daunting. In terms of land area, the Congo is the third largest country in Africa. With some 66 million people, it is the fourth most populous.

Yet the greatest obstacle is not size. Beyond the immediate problems of continued insecurity in the east, the biggest hurdle will be overcoming an historical legacy of dictatorship, decay and plunder. Because governance was so poor for so long, the goal is not simply "post-war reconstruction" — that is, restoring the situation that prevailed before the outbreak of war in 1996. It is to start building, often for the first time ever, institutions that will genuinely serve the interests of the country's citizens.

History of pillage

After a prolonged period of Belgian rule, in which very few Congolese attained positions in the colonial administration, the Congo abruptly won independence in 1960. The first decade was turbulent. Cold War interventions, ethnic tensions and secessionist rebellions undermined the popularly elected president, Patrice Lumumba, who was deposed and assassinated. In 1965, General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (later Mobutu Sese Seko), seized power, with the backing of Western intelligence agencies.

Mobutu's Zaire (as he renamed the country in 1971) became known as one of the world's foremost examples of an autocratic, corrupt state. Estimates of the amounts lost or squandered ran into the tens of billions of dollars.

Although the state appeared to be tightly controlled from the top, in reality its effective authority did not reach very far. Government employees routinely neglected their duties, diverted funds and used their positions to make money. Some regional governors ran their territories like semi-autonomous fiefdoms. Army officers embezzled the salaries of their subordinates and trafficked in arms, gold and diamonds. Unpaid police and troops survived through pillage and extortion.

Presidential and legislative vote in 2006 brought in the Congo's first elected government in more than 40 years.

War and transition

Mobutu's state had decayed considerably by the early 1990s. Its fragility became glaring in the aftermath of the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda in 1994. Mobutu provided a haven in eastern Zaire for the genocide's perpetrators after they were overthrown by Rwandan rebels. These "genocidaires," as they were known, then repeatedly attacked Rwanda, ultimately prompting the new Rwandan government to retaliate by backing a coalition of dissidents known as the Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo (AFDL), led by Laurent Kabila.

Although Mobutu's forces were adept at terrorizing villagers, they proved incapable of military defence. The small AFDL, bolstered by professional Rwandan troops, rapidly captured territory as the Zairean army retreated. In town after town, local residents celebrated the army's departure. In May 1997, the insurgents occupied Kinshasa, shortly after Mobutu fled into exile (where he died of cancer a few months later). Mr. Kabila became president and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

According to Georges Nzogola-Ntalaja, a well-known Congolese academic currently working with the Africa Governance Institute of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the

Getty Images / Eddie Gerald

Congolese soldier in North Kivu, where thousands of dissident or foreign fighters still oppose the central government and have displaced a half million people.

ability of the ragtag AFDL and relatively small countries such as Rwanda and Uganda to exert such influence over the much larger Congo "would have been unthinkable if the Congolese state institutions were functioning in a normal way as agencies of governance and national security, rather than as Mafia-type organizations serving the selfish interests of Mobutu and his entourage."

Hopes were initially high that the new government would build a different kind of state. But authoritarianism soon followed. And after President Kabila broke with his former Rwandan and Ugandan allies, those countries backed new insurgent groups in the east. In August 1998, the country was plunged back into war.

This second war was far more devastating than the first. It involved multiple Congolese groups and drew in the armies of more than a half-dozen neighbouring countries. With most factions responsible for serious atrocities, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed. Massive displacement, the disruption of agriculture and the collapse of the health care system pushed the total estimated death toll to 3–4 million.

The war's major contenders signed an initial ceasefire in 1999, but it was only poorly observed. After President Kabila was assassinated by members of his personal guard in 2001, his son and successor, Major-General Joseph Kabila, pushed more energetically for peace. That shift, combined with greater international pressure on neighbouring countries to withdraw, led to the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement in Sun City, South Africa, in 2002.

The protagonists established a transitional government, with Joseph Kabila as president and the central leaders of four main groups as vice-presidents. A transitional parliament also had representation from the different groups. This arrangement succeeded in ending most of the fighting.

But the compromises of the transition did not favour serious reform. Most official appointments were made on the basis of political connections, not merit. The proliferation of institutions facilitated corruption. In 2003, about two-thirds of the budget was spent outside normal procedures.

Political legitimacy

By bringing into office the first truly elected government in four decades, the presidential, legislative and provincial assembly elections of 2006 opened the door for the possibility of deeper reform. Although the elections were marked by some violence and the losers contested the final results, international observers generally deemed the contest to have been free and fair. The high turnout — 70 per cent in the first round of the presidential poll in July and 65 per cent in the second round in October — gave the winner, President Kabila, the political legitimacy he had lacked in the transition period.

Many different parties won seats in the National Assembly. Mr. Kabila's own party has only 111 of the 500 seats, although an

Armed groups in eastern Congo

Although a general peace accord was signed in 2002 and the major parties in the Congolese civil war disarmed or merged into the new national army, several factions continue to operate, mainly in the east. All have carried out massacres and other abuses:

General Laurent Nkunda, a former commander of the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie (RCD) during the civil war. His group later integrated into the new army but then split in 2004, ostensibly to "protect" the Tutsi community against attacks by other groups. He is believed to have some 4,000 troops and has engaged in major battles with the Congolese army in the southeastern districts of North Kivu.

Ituri militias, comprising mainly local ethnic militias in the Ituri forests of Orientale Province. Three of the remaining militia groups, claiming a combined strength of 4,500, signed an agreement with the government to disarm and demobilize, but as of early November only about 1,500 had handed in their arms.

Mai Mai, remnants of the local "self-defence" militias that fought the Congolese factions backed by Rwanda and Uganda during the civil war. Many have since demobilized or joined the army, but Mai Mai groups, some claiming several thousand members, remain active in North Kivu, South Kivu and Katanga.

Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, opposed to the government of neighbouring Rwanda and commanded in part by former leaders of the 1994 genocide in that country. Estimated to number 6–7,000, the FDLR is active in North and South Kivu and often clashes with General Nkunda's forces.

alliance of parties that backed his presidential bid holds a comfortable majority with 338 seats. The alliance also has more than half the seats in the Senate. His government, named in February 2007, has members from different parties and is headed by Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga, who was a close colleague of Patrice Lumumba at independence in 1960.

While the new government is less inclusive than the transitional arrangement, its electoral legitimacy means that it "will be in a much better position to adopt policies that are uniform," observes Mr. Menkerios. "It would have more cohesion and would be better equipped to implement coherent strategies than during the transition." Besides, the governing coalition "is wide enough by any country's standards."

However, Mr. Menkerios adds, political tensions remain a problem, in part because the current parties grew out of "politico-military organizations" and continue to operate in a combative mode. One example was the outbreak of armed clashes in Kinshasa in March 2007 between the president's Republican Guard and a security force loyal to Jean-Pierre Bemba, who lost to Mr. Kabila in the presidential election. Some 200 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the fighting.

MONUC and the rest of the international community are encouraging the government to accommodate the opposition, Mr. Menkerios explains. The constitution provides a formal status for the opposition, and opposition deputies are often included in decision-making roles in the legislature's various commissions. Mr. Kengo wa Dondo, a former prime minister under Mobutu and currently an opposition figure, was elected to head the Senate, even though Mr. Kabila's alliance holds a majority of Senate seats.

In his inauguration address in December 2006, President Kabila acknowledged that the Congolese administration "exists in name only" and that there is an urgent need for a "refoundation of the state." The main pillars of his government, as of any modern state, he said, will be the "trilogy of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights."

This would mark a sharp reversal. During four decades of dictatorship and war, the *violation* of human rights appeared to be a pillar of state policy. Changing things around will require overhauling and reforming another trilogy — the army, police and courts.

Reuters / Luc Gnago

President Joseph Kabila (centre) has pledged to work towards good governance, democracy and respect for human rights.

Military reform

According to a report in February 2007 by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and MONUC's Human Rights Division, fully 88 per cent of all politically motivated or organized murders, rapes, beatings and other human rights violations recorded in the DRC in the second half of 2006 were committed by the government's own repressive bodies.

The report found some modest improvement on the part of the army, which saw its share of recorded abuses decline from 53 per cent in the first half of 2006 to 40 per cent in the second.

But the army still is experiencing great difficulties, in large part as a legacy of the transition period. The Sun City peace agreement provided for building a new army, basically as an amalgamation of officers and troops from the various armed factions. "It was a really good idea," notes Lieutenant-General Babacar Gaye, MONUC's force commander, since the arrangement helped end most of the fighting. "But unfortunately, it didn't produce a good military," he adds, emphasizing the difficulties of getting troops of different allegiances and unequal levels of training to work together effectively.

For example, in North Kivu, General Gaye told *Africa Renewal*, one of the new "integrated brigades" disintegrated in 2006 as a result of political and ethnic tensions. Therefore, MONUC's goal "is to avoid this disintegration, first of all, and then to help the Congolese design their future military. But it is a huge task. It's a long-term process."

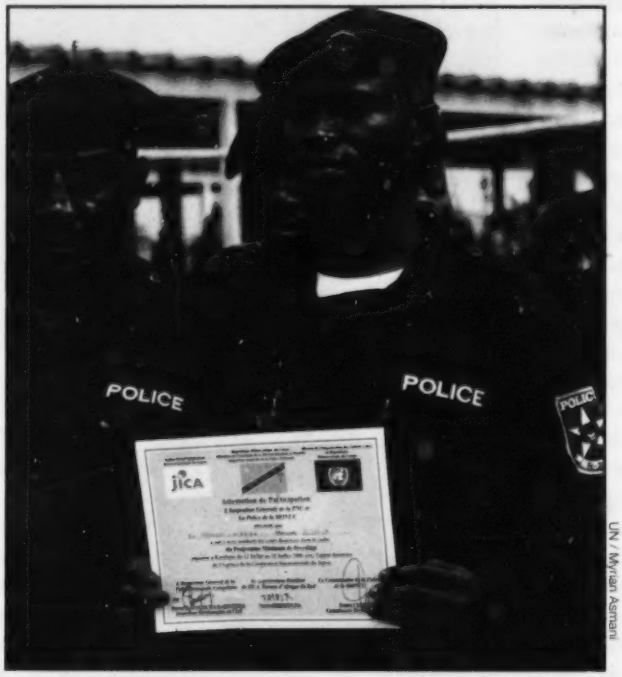
The Congolese army, which has sent thousands of troops against the forces of dissident General Laurent Nkunda in North Kivu, has had difficulty capturing and holding terrain.

In addition to providing tactical support on the ground, MONUC — along with the European Union and some donor agencies — is helping the army professionalize and become a better-integrated and more coherent organization. A military census conducted with South African assistance helped weed out nonexistent "ghost" soldiers whose names were on the payroll. Their removal enabled the government to increase the basic pay of ordinary soldiers.

Improving soldiers' economic and social conditions is essential, to keep them from extorting food and money from civilians, Ross Mountain, deputy special representative of the UN Secretary-General, told *Africa Renewal*. All those working on humanitarian issues in the DRC now agree that security sector reform "has to be top of the hit parade." While visiting North Kivu, to help coordinate humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict, he realized that

people's foremost concern was security. "If there was one measure that could be taken at the time, it would be to pay the army," he recalls. "I come from a humanitarian background, and to come to the realization that one measure is to pay the army sounded completely insane. But everyone said: 'Yeah'."

Army abuses, while still widespread, appear to be declining, in part because of better training, stronger command, improved living conditions and the prosecution of officers and troops who carry out atrocities.



UN / Myriam Asmani

Congolese police officers graduate from a MONUC training programme: Greater professionalism should help reduce abuses against civilians.

Police training

However, abuses by the national police rose dramatically between the first and second halves of 2006, from 24 to 39 per cent of total abuses. Serious violations by the police continued well into 2007, according to a report to the UN General Assembly in August by an independent expert, Titinga Frédéric Pacéré, an eminent jurist from Burkina Faso. Mr. Pacéré cited a long list of crimes by national police officers, including brutalization of prisoners, rapes of women and young girls and killings of villagers.

Historically, the police have been severely underfunded, ill-trained and inefficient. Today there are just over 100,000 police in the country. About half have received training by MONUC in various tasks, including ensuring order during elections. The European Union is financing police reforms, while UNDP manages a fund to help equip the police.

Congo's national prosecutor has vowed to crack down on police who impose arbitrary fines or otherwise extort money. In September, Interior Minister Denis Kalume warned police officers: "All actions of the Congolese police, as guardians of the law, must be guided by the law, national interest and legality."

Reviving a 'degenerate' justice system

In theory, the DRC's courts are also supposed to uphold the law. But like other aspects of the state, the judicial system has suffered from years of decay. There is only one judge for every 30,000 people, most are poorly paid and the physical conditions of the courts are decrepit. Trial proceedings are extremely slow and judgments often seem arbitrary. Those with wealth or political connections are very rarely brought to court.

In a country that has experienced so many war crimes over the past decade, only a handful of high-level perpetrators have so far been tried and sentenced by national courts (the International Criminal Court in the Hague is also prosecuting some suspected war criminals).

In the words of Bruno Mbiango, the first president of the Supreme Court, political pressures and monetary corruption have produced a "deregulated justice, a perverted, dirty, degenerate justice."

With insecurity still widespread and public confidence in the police and courts very limited, vigilante justice has been growing. Police and human rights activists in Bukavu, the provincial capital of South Kivu, report that killings of suspected thieves, rapists and other criminals occur almost weekly. Some are beaten to death, others burned alive.

Moïse Cifende Kaciko, head of a human rights group in South Kivu, warns of the dangers of such lynchings, since they deny any rights to the accused — some of whom may be innocent — and can be employed to settle scores. Julienne Mushagalusa of the Congolese Association of Women Jurists argues that vigilantism should be countered by prosecuting those who practice it, while at the same time the country's judicial system is reformed. "We have to spread a culture of belief in justice," she told a Congolese newspaper.

Although public funding for the judicial system has been growing, it remains far behind other branches of government. The government budget for 2007 allocated 2.6 bn Congolese francs (about US$5.2 mn) to the courts, compared with FC24 bn — nine times more — for the executive branch. To some extent, external donors are helping to fill the gap, with the UK, European Commission, UNDP and others financing various programmes to strengthen the courts, train judges and improve the abysmal conditions in the prisons.

Judicial reform "is a major challenge for this country," UNDP Country Director Babacar Cissé told *Africa Renewal*. UNDP has set up a technical unit in the Ministry of Justice to oversee implementation of the various donor-funded programmes. In the provinces, some courts are undergoing physical rehabilitation. Also, explains Mr. Cissé, UNDP and its partners are considering ways to link the regular judicial system with the traditional courts of the Congo's various ethnic groups. "It is important," says Mr. Cissé, "to root justice at the local and provincial levels."

Local elections on the horizon

When the parties to the Congo's civil war were putting the final touches on the Sun City peace accords of 2002, they recognized that the new state could not be effective if it tried to operate primarily from

Kinshasa. According to the agreement, the first elections were to be held for local offices, followed by national elections. But haggling within the transitional government and the sheer logistical problems of organizing multiple elections across such a vast country brought a shift. Deputies to 11 provincial assemblies were elected at the same time as the National Assembly in July 2006, but the local government polls were postponed.

Delays in the legislature over basic laws on decentralization and on setting up a new independent electoral commission mean that local elections cannot yet be scheduled, although some Congolese and UN officials believe they may be possible in 2008. Organizing them will be "more complex" than holding the last national and provincial elections, notes Blé Kacouchia, head of MONUC's voter registration office. In the 2006 elections there were 385 national and provincial constituencies, but for the local poll there will be more than 6,000.

Nevertheless, Mr. Kacouchia emphasized to *Africa Renewal*, the local elections will be vital. "If we want to restore peace and sustainable security in this country, especially at the local level, the people will have to be able to elect those who manage their day-to-day affairs."

A cleaner bureaucracy, a fuller treasury

The Congo's civil administration is in need of a thorough overhaul, acknowledges Minister of Planning Olivier Kamitatu. In sum, the goal is: "Less corruption, greater efficiency, more transparency." In September, the Berlin-based watchdog group Transparency International released its latest "corruption perceptions index," in which it ranks countries according to various surveys of businesspeople, government officials, travelers and others. The DRC ranked 168 out of 179 countries — among the worst in how corrupt it appears.

But, Mr. Kamitatu told *Africa Renewal*, "The Congo has changed profoundly, and I think the Congo is no longer synonymous with an environment of corruption." Among the changes, he cites the creation of a democratically elected National Assembly and Senate with the authority to grill the executive. There has also emerged a "new leadership" determined to combat corrupt practices and punish those caught pilfering or otherwise misusing state resources.

News reports from across the country indicate that Congolese are taking these changes seriously. In the province of Bas Congo, the director of a national cement company is on trial for diverting cement. In South Kivu, the governor suspended the mayor of Bukavu for embezzling money and illegally selling land, as well as top officials of the local post and telecommunications office after workers exposed the illicit sale of post office vehicles. In Kikwit, employees of a government office to assist small and medium-size enterprises denounced their boss for embezzling funds earmarked for salaries.

A leaner civil service

While seeking to end impunity for corruption at the top, the government also plans to improve conditions for public employees. In theory, this would reduce the temptation to steal and extort simply to survive. It would also bolster overall morale and efficiency.

One problem, says Mr. Kamitatu, is that the administration is "bloated," at least on paper. There are an unknown number of "ghost workers" on the payroll, with managers pocketing the salaries of these fictitious civil servants. Through a "trimming down" of the civil service roster with computerization and other better management techniques, he explains, the funds saved through the elimination of nonexistent employees can be used to pay real workers more regularly.

In recent years, top officials in the DRC's various state firms were nominated not because of competence or skills, but for "political" reasons, notes Minister of the Portfolio Jeannine Mabunda, who is responsible for overseeing public enterprises. "It's essential that things go back to normal," she affirms. All top management positions in 26 state enterprises were opened for competitive recruitment in June. Since then, out of 6,500 applicants, 1,482 passed an examination, and that number is to be narrowed down to 455 through further screening. The trade unions have been critical of the process, maintaining that they were not adequately consulted. Sceptics will be watching carefully to see if the final selection reflects any favouritism towards individuals aligned with pro-government parties.

Collecting more taxes

One goal of such reforms is not only to prevent the waste of public funds, but also to enhance the government's ability to collect more domestic revenue — one of the key indicators of state capacity in any country. In June, Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga announced that the contracts of some 60 foreign mining companies would be reviewed, since many of the contracts signed during the war — often with corrupt officials — allow excessive repatriation of profits abroad and provide only minimal payments to the Congolese treasury.

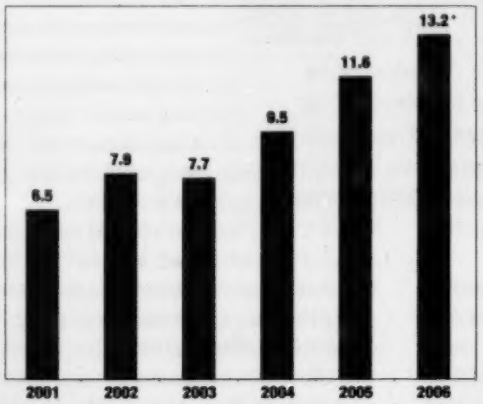
The government is reforming its tax and customs administration, which currently is fragmented into numerous entities and makes it easy for the wealthy to evade paying. In 2006, the government's own revenues were able to cover only 60 per cent of budgetary spending, with the remainder covered by external lending or donor aid.

The government also plans to simplify the tax code, strengthen its "large taxpayers" unit and set up 10 tax centres for medium-sized enterprises around the country — currently there is only one. The government already has been able to significantly increase its revenue collection, which rose from 91 bn Congolese francs (FC) in 2001 to an estimated FC529 bn in 2006. Even taking post-war economic growth into account, revenue collection still has risen markedly, from 6.5 per cent of the gross domestic product in 2001 to 13.2 per cent in 2006 (see graph, left).

— ***Ernest Harsch**, Kinshasa*

DRC: Domestic revenue collection

as % of GDP



* Estimated.

Source: UN Africa Renewal from International Monetary Fund data, September 2007.

UN / A. Burridge

Since the end of the war, there has been a revitalization of Congolese civil society groups.

Revenue and responsibility

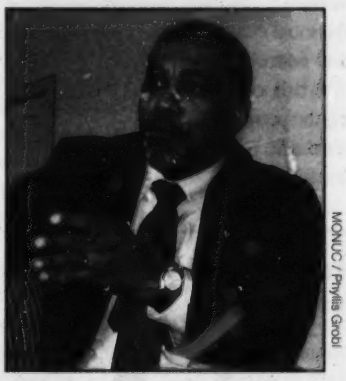
Beyond elections, much is needed to improve the physical infrastructure and institutional capacity of local government entities. Even some of the DRC's current provincial assemblies lack proper buildings and office space. Most have only minimal budgets.

According to the constitution, 40 per cent of the "national" revenues collected in each province should be made available to that province. In June, a contentious debate erupted between the national government and provincial governors. The governors demanded that the 40 per cent be turned over immediately, while the government insisted that mechanisms have to be put into place to ensure proper use of the funds.

Mr. Kamitatu, the planning minister, points out that the 40 per cent allocation "is not a gift." The provinces will be expected to use the funds to provide sanitation, protect the environment, maintain rural roads and perform other public services. "It is not simply a transfer of financial resources, but a transfer of responsibilities. And for a transfer of responsibilities, there has to be real administrative capacity."

However such details are worked out, the UN's Mr. Menkerios believes that the development of viable local government bodies will make it possible to better resolve the many conflicts over land and other issues that exist among the DRC's different communities. "It is much better for these communities, whose lives depend on the resolution of these conflicts, to address them there [locally], rather than at the national level, where they will become more politicized.... People who live together will be in a better position to compromise."

Moreover, Mr. Menkerios adds, local elections can widen participation in the political process more generally. "These elections, which did not exist in the past in the Congo, are going to lead to greater diffusion of decision-making, which will lead to more democratic participation."



MONUC / Phyllis Grobl

Genuine decentralization requires transferring both resources and responsibilities to the provinces, says Minister of Planning Olivier Kamitatu.

Stirrings at the grassroots

Throughout the DRC's long years of state decay, ordinary Congolese found many ingenious ways to cope. Through village associations, churches, professional bodies and civil society groups, they tackled the problems of daily survival and sought to defend themselves against rapacious officials, soldiers, mine owners and loggers. Hundreds, if not thousands, of such groups emerged, some operating only in specific localities, others across provinces or countrywide.

During the 2006 elections, some civil society figures joined or formed parties and were elected to office. As a result, maintains Pierre Kibaka, president of a human rights group in Kisangani, "Civil society lost many of its activists, especially among the most outstanding." Deogratias Vale, another civil society leader in Kisangani, concurs: "They left suddenly. That created a void, since no backup was prepared."

Mr. Menkerios thinks that the war, rather than the elections, was the biggest factor in weakening civil society. And with the end of the war, civil society "is on the comeback." Mr. Cissé, of UNDP, agrees. "For several years there has been a kind of revitalization of civil society in this country." While some people went into electoral politics, many others remain engaged in civil affairs. "Women's associations are extremely active at the moment."

The existence of vibrant local associations and civil society groups provides an opportunity for the DRC's leaders, some political analysts point out. Rather than building a state bureaucracy cut off from society, they have a chance to better link government and administration to the interests and concerns of ordinary Congolese. Over the long term, that will not only ensure that people's needs are better met, but also that the new Congolese state can function more effectively throughout the vast territory.

MONUC's Mr. Kacouchia is optimistic. If it is possible for leaders to agree on the road forward, then the Congolese people will have a chance to realize their country's potential. That will be a tremendous gain, he says, not only for the Congo, "but also for the region and all of Africa." ■

AIDS epidemic

from page 4

Halperin, an AIDS expert at the US's Harvard School of Public Health, are continuing to experience "real nightmares." Whatever else the revision in the overall AIDS figures may show, he adds, "this doesn't mean the epidemic is going away."

Statistical refinements

In poor, largely rural countries with weak health systems and limited ability to collect data, measuring the extent of an infectious disease is always difficult, notes Dr. Paul De Lay, a UNAIDS director. "The challenge is equally true for TB, polio and childhood diarrhoea."

In the case of HIV/AIDS, earlier estimates were based mainly on information collected on young women visiting public health clinics either because they were pregnant or because they feared they had been infected. Those results were then extrapolated to the rest of the population to come up with estimated national infection rates. But over time experts realized that data from urban clinics were skewed: they gave too much statistical weight to sex workers, drug users and people with multiple partners, relative to other sectors of the population.

As donor countries gradually began providing more funds to combat the disease, some of those resources were allocated for more scientifically designed national surveys, at a cost of $2–3 mn per country. Across the board, the surveys showed that the scale of the epidemic was somewhat less than previously thought.

According to UNAIDS, analyses of national survey results in India in July reduced estimates of the number of people living with HIV in that country by more than half, from 5.7 million people to 2.5 million, a revision that accounted for half of the decline in the global estimate. Much of the remaining adjustment, reports UNAIDS, came from revised estimates for several African countries, including Angola, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

Some independent AIDS researchers had been arguing for several years that the UN's earlier estimates were too high, and complain that their arguments were ignored. A few charged that the figures were consciously exaggerated as part of a strategy to raise international alarm about the disease and prompt donors to release more funds. Dr. De Lay regards such accusations as "absurd." It would be "technically impossible" for UNAIDS "to somehow rig the numbers," he says, since they are gathered by national health ministries and reviewed by many experts inside and outside the UN system.

Reading an AIDS education pamphlet in Uganda: In some countries, young people are reducing risky behaviour that can make them vulnerable to infection.

Many countries have not yet conducted national surveys, and for those that have, it is impractical to update the costly surveys every year. So while the surveys are now helping to produce better data, the figures reported by UNAIDS and WHO remain rough estimates. To demonstrate the continuing uncertainty, the *Update* report includes a range of low and high estimates with most of its baseline figures. For instance, the total of 33.2 million people living with HIV worldwide may actually be as low as 30.6 million — or as high as 36.1 million.

No time for complacency

Whether the numbers are going up or down, there should be no complacency, UNAIDS and other experts warn. There is still no cure for AIDS, Dr. De Lay points out. Moreover, in a number of countries that had previously made progress in reducing infection rates, but in which anti-AIDS programmes have diminished, "we are seeing a return of the epidemic," he notes. The *Update* reports that prevalence rates are rising again in the US, the UK and Germany — as well as in Uganda, which once was hailed for its success in bringing down HIV rates.

Nor should the international community slacken its own efforts, argue AIDS advocates. Current international spending, at around $10 bn annually, continues to fall short of actual needs. "There's still a huge epidemic out there that still needs huge resources to win the battle," says Paul Zeitz, executive director of the Global AIDS Alliance, an international non-governmental group headquartered in Washington, DC.

UNAIDS and WHO are planning to issue a report in 2008 on financing the global campaign against AIDS. It is possible, says Dr. De Lay, that projected treatment costs, such as for providing antiretroviral medicines to people with full-blown AIDS, will be about 5 per cent less in 2010 than previously estimated. But that total will still be around $38 bn — far higher than current AIDS financing.

"We have to recognize the very long-term nature of the HIV pandemic," says Dr. De Cock. "We're facing decades of this problem." Of those currently infected, "some of them require treatment now, and all of them will in time. The qualitative implications have changed very little." ■

Saving Africa's forests

from page 7

settlements are not triggered by local people. They are instigated by leaders. Those leaders are selling public land that does not belong to them or trying to provide people with access to land in order to get their vote in the next election. This is very different from the classic case of local poverty and forest degradation that we are often talking about.... The root cause is greed."

He cites one case in which a Kenyan member of parliament sold 14,000 hectares of forested public trust land to unsuspecting buyers. "He brought people from different districts and secured their vote in the election," he charges. Although the incident caused a public uproar and the government evicted more than 10,000 settlers, the legislator was never prosecuted and never returned the money. As a result, the buyers returned to the trust lands and the dispute has yet to be resolved.

In one sense, Mr. Lambrechts asserts, such cases are an unintended consequence of multiparty democracy. "One of the side effects is that politicians sometimes use forest land to buy votes. In a country where so much of the economy is based on agriculture and forest land is generally seen as idle land, politicians promise people land in exchange for support."

Yet, civil society activists point out, democracy also offers solutions to such problems by holding elected officials and parties accountable to the public at election time and enabling a free press to alert voters and decision-makers to abuses. Democracy makes government more responsive to pressure from organized grassroots groups like Kenya's Green Belt Movement, a national women's organization that has planted an estimated 30 mn trees since its founding in 1977. Democracy can enhance the influence of the private sector as well, allowing businesses to choose parties and candidates most attuned to their interests — including their interest in preserving forests.

At loggerheads over logging

Commercial logging is the second largest contributor to deforestation in Africa, threatening the continent's existing indigenous forests and, in some cases, its political stability. Part of the problem, say environmentalists and forestry experts, is the common use of clear cutting and other unsound methods that strip large areas of trees and vegetation, damaging the forests' ability to retain water and provide habitat for animal and plant life. Clear cutting sometimes erodes the exposed soil to a point at which natural regeneration or reforestation efforts are impossible.

Reuters / James Akena

A forest hunter in Uganda: Many local communities depend on forests for food, medicinal plants and other supplies.

UN and non-governmental researchers report that the indiscriminate, labour-intensive methods common to logging operations in Central Africa and other developing regions waste as many as half of the trees cut down through destruction of non-commercial varieties and clearing of forestland for roads, logging camps and work areas. Much of the refuse and surrounding brush is burned, releasing carbon back into the atmosphere.

The scope of the problem can be enormous. Mr. Lambrechts reports that during one three-month period, UNEP monitors recorded the loss of 14,000 trees at a single logging camp.

Vast areas of Central Africa's indigenous forests are at risk. In the DRC alone, the World Bank estimates that logging concessions, many of which were issued improperly by unscrupulous officials during the country's war, cover 50 mn hectares of deep forests. In 2002 the DRC government suspended 25 mn hectares of logging concessions granted as part of a World Bank-supported review of dozens of logging and mining contracts signed by previous governments. The government also adopted a new forestry code to improve forestry management practices and ensure transparency in contracting procedures.

But the inability of many developing countries to regulate and manage their forests due to conflict, weak law enforcement, poor administrative authority and corruption has allowed illegal logging to flourish. In 2006, the World Bank estimated that annual losses to illegal logging totalled $15 bn globally, including $5 bn in government revenues lost in unpaid taxes, royalties and other fees. In Gabon, illegal logging is estimated to comprise 70 per cent of the entire industry and in Ghana, about 60 per cent. The scale of the problem, and the corruption and contempt for law that accompany it, the Bank notes, "undermine any nation's attempt to achieve sustainable economic growth, social balance and environmental protection."

Both legal and illegal logging in indigenous forests can also accelerate human

encroachment on the forests by opening up the areas to settlement and commerce. "Logging companies are effectively road engineers," the international environmental group Greenpeace noted in a report on logging in the DRC. "Once the rainforest is opened up by logging roads the area becomes vulnerable to clearance for agriculture," which leads to the permanent loss of forestland and the release of greenhouse gases.

The organization estimates that logging concessions in Central Africa's primary forests cover an area the size of Spain, and that deforestation could release more than 34 bn tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere by 2050 — about the same amount of carbon emitted by the UK over the past 60 years. Although the World Bank, the UN and local governments have tried to reduce the scope and impact of illegal logging, Greenpeace and other critics argue that even legal logging of indigenous forests creates the risk of deforestation in developing countries, contributing to climate change and environmental damage.

Avoiding deforestation

Efforts to bring the private sector into the struggle to preserve the world's remaining old-growth forests are also underway internationally. Under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) established by the Kyoto Protocol — the international treaty aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions — Northern polluters can offset some of their discharges by financing "green" projects in the developing South.

In the case of forestry, the rules allow countries to receive credit for planting new trees, which absorb carbon as they grow (see box page 6). But similar incentives not to cut down existing forests, a phenomenon known as "avoided deforestation," were excluded from the CDM amid disputes among governments about how to calculate their value as carbon storehouses and what to do if protected trees are later cut down.

Heavily forested countries charge that the failure to extend CDM financing to the preservation of old-growth forests is both unfair and unwise. In September 2007, Gabon, Cameroon, DRC, Costa Rica, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Malaysia, which together contain 80 per cent of the world's remaining tropical forests, formed the Forestry Eight to challenge the exclusion.

If avoided deforestation were eligible for the same CDM incentives available to reforestation programmes, they argue, they would be eligible for tens of billions of dollars in green investment by polluting countries. That money could then be invested in other climate-friendly development programmes. They also note that to date African and other poor developing countries have largely failed to attract CDM investments and lack the resources to adjust to climate change and reduce their own emissions.

In early 2007 the World Bank announced plans for a pilot $250 mn fund to finance avoided deforestation projects in developing countries. A Bank official told *Africa Renewal* that the lending agency hopes to launch the fund by the end of the year.

Although the proposal enjoys considerable support among developing countries, it remains controversial, with questions remaining about how to calculate the carbon value of existing forests and fears that forest nations could blackmail industrialized countries by threatening to cut their forests down. One senior US environmental adviser, noting that deforestation is prohibited in most countries, denounced the proposal, telling the UK's *Financial Times* newspaper that, "you would be paying people not to engage in an illegal activity." The proposal was approved in Bali in December at the first of a series of meetings to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

Preserving Africa's surviving tropical forests and planting new trees to replace those lost to deforestation could help reduce the severity of climate change by absorbing more carbon from the air.

However humanity chooses to preserve them, Mr. Lambrechts concludes, the world's indigenous forests are simply too valuable to lose. "For ten thousand years we have been conquering the earth," he says. "Now the earth is full and we have no choice but to manage it instead." ■

Mobile banking

from page 3

then can obtain the cash from a Safaricom agent by entering a secret code and showing personal identification.

Similar services are now available in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. In Zambia, Celpay, a product of First National Bank of South Africa, allows businesses to pay for services and receive payments via mobile phone accounts. Celpay currently processes up to $10 mn in payments per month.

In South Africa, First National Bank also partners with cell phone provider Mobile Telephone Networks (MTN), which provides services for South Africans who already have a bank account but also want to send and receive money over cell phones.

Between them, MTN and Wizzit enable 500,000 South Africans who do not have accounts to send and receive money to relatives, pay for goods and services, check balances and settle utility bills. Until the advent of the two services, South Africans often paid couriers the equivalent of $30–50 to deliver cash to relatives. Now such transactions cost only $0.50 through mobile bank networks.

The greatest impact is in rural areas, says Beyers Coetzee, a rural community officer for Wizzit. "Eighty per cent of all farmers do not have bank accounts." Moreover, he adds, a Wizzit account, unlike a regular bank account, is not closed if the customer does not use it regularly. That is "very useful for seasonal workers" in particular.

Rob Conway, head of the Global System for Mobile Communications Association, an international group of mobile phone service providers, says that such innovations have "changed the lives of millions of Africans, catalyzing economic development and strengthening social ties."

Lauri Kivinen, head of corporate affairs for the Nokia Siemens network, agrees that this development is significant. "It means unprecedented, substantial change for ordinary people," he told *Africa Renewal*. Through mobile phone banking, people can "extend their social and business networks, boost their productivity and so much more, all at the touch of a few buttons on a cell phone." ■

AFRICA AGENDA

31 January–2 February 2008, Addis-Ababa (Ethiopia) — 10th Summit of African Union Heads of State and Government. Website <www.africa-union.org>

7–9 February 2008, New Delhi (India) — World Sustainable Development Forum. Organized by the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), on the theme "Sustainable Development and Climate Change." Tel (91) 11 24682100 / 41504900, fax (91) 11 24682144 / 24682145, e-mail <dsds@teri.res.in>, website <www.teriin.org/dsds/2008/index.htm>

13–15 February 2008, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) — NOVATECH, the ICT Africa Marketplace. Under the auspices of the NEPAD Council, in collaboration with Pro-Invest of the European Union. Website <http://ictafrica.nepad-council.org/>

22–23 February 2008, Berlin (Germany) — Berlin Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change. Website <http://web.fu-berlin.de/ffu/akumwelt/bc2008/>

3–7 March 2008, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) — Science with Africa. To promote science and technology in Africa's development, and organized by the UN Economic Commission for Africa and Intelligence in Science. Tel (251) 11 5445098, fax (251) 11 5510365, e-mail <ecainfo@uneca.org>, website <www.science-withafrica.com/>

4–6 March 2008, Washington DC (USA) — International Renewable Energy Conference. Organized by the American Council on Renewable Energy. Tel (1) 202 393-0001, website <www.wirec2008.org/>

10–12 March 2008, Cape Town (South Africa) — International Conference on Integrated Water Resources Management. Organized by the Water Research Commission of South Africa, and aimed at sharing the experiences and lessons of developing countries in integrated water resources management. Contact Elanda Botes, tel (27) 12 336 7550, fax (27) 12 328 6397, e-mail <wbv@dwaf.gov.za>, website <www.wrc.org.za/downloads/events/IWRM-IHP_Conf-Call1_March08.pdf>

10–14 March 2008, Accra (Ghana) — 2nd Global Summit on HIV/AIDS, Traditional Medicine and Indigenous Knowledge. Organized by Africa First of Minnesota, USA, in association with the Ghana Ministry of Health, World Health Organization, UNAIDS Ghana Office, Ghana AIDS Commission and Esperanza Medicines Foundation. E-mail <info@africa-first.com>, website <http://africa-first.com/2hivsummit2008/>

20–25 April 2008, Accra (Ghana) — UNCTAD XII. The theme for the 12th quadrennial UN Conference on Trade and Development is "Addressing the Opportunities and Challenges of Globalization for Development." Tel (41) 22 917 5828, e-mail <unctadpress@unctad.org>, website <www.unctadxii.org>

WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE

23–25 November 2007, Kampala (Uganda) — Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Tel (256) 414-345661/257525/258252/237309, fax (256) 414-237310, e-mail <info@chogm2007.ug>, website <www.chogm2007.ug/>

29–30 November 2007, Detroit, Michigan (USA) — First Annual USA-Africa International Business Conference. On the theme "Harnessing the Expertise of Business Professionals, Academicians and Government Officials for Economic Development." Organized by Global Strategic Management Inc. Website <http://gsmi-usa.com/UAIBC.aspx>

3–14 December 2007, Bali (Indonesia) — UN Climate Change Conference. Website <http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop_13/items/4049.php>

7 December 2007, Lisbon (Portugal) — EU-Africa Business Summit 2007. Seeking to reinforce the private sector's commitment to work with the African Union and European Union to strengthen Africa's economic development. Website <www.summits.aip.pt/Africa/index.asp>

AFRICA BOOKS

Twenty-First-Century Peace Operations, ed. William J. Durch (US Institute of Peace Press, Washington, DC, USA, 2006; 660 pp; pb $35, hb $65)

China in Africa: Partner, Competitor or Hegemon? by Chris Alden (Zed Books, London, UK, 2007; 154 pp; hb £45, pb £12.99)

Agriculture tropicale et exploitations familiales d'Afrique by Hughes Dupriez (Terres et Vie, Nivelles, Belgium, 2007; 480 pp; €42)

Democratic Reform in Africa: Its Impact on Governance and Poverty Alleviation, ed. Muna Ndulo (Ohio University Press, Ohio, USA, and James Currey Publishers, Oxford, UK, 2006; 304 pp; hb $55)

Identity Matters: Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict, eds. James L. Peacock, Patricia M. Thornton and Patrick B. Inman (Berghahn Books, New York, NY, 2007; 244 pp; hb $80)

Le droit international et la guerre: Evolution et problèmes actuels by Daniel Iagolnitzer (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 132 pp; €12.50)

Shaping a New Africa, ed. Abdullah Mohamoud (Stylus Publishing, Herndon, Virginia, USA, 2006; 256 pp; $30.50)

Ikambere et la vie quotidienne des femmes touchées par le VIH/SIDA, ed. Bernadette Rwegera (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 172 pp; €17, FF112)

Exploited: Migrant Labour in the New Global Economy by Toby Shelley (Zed Books, London, UK, 2007; 144 pp; hb £50, pb £14.99, $27)

Des conflits locaux à la guerre régionale en Afrique Centrale: Le Congo-Kinshasa oriental 1996-2007 by Alphonse Maindo M.N. (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 310 pp; €27)

Les "faiseurs de paix" au Congo: Gestion d'une crise internationale dans un Etat sous tutelle by Jean-Claude Williame (GRIP-Complexe, Brussels, Belgium, 2007; 219 pp; €15.90)

Les eaux et forêts de la RD Congo: Changement climatique de la planète: Les enjeux by Kashemukunda Kasongo-Numbi (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 200 pp; €16.50, FF108)

RD Congo: Les élections, et après? Intellectuels et politiques posent les enjeux de l'après-transition, eds. Eddie Tambwe Kitenge Bia Kitoko and Anatole Collinet Makosso (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 276 pp; pb €25, FF164)

Gendarmerie et reconstruction d'un état de droit au Congo-Kinshasa by Alphonse Ndjate Omanyondo N'Koy (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 296 pp; €29.50, FF194)

Emergent Conflict and Peaceful Change by Hugh Miall (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, UK, 2007; 224 pp; hb £50, pb £18.99)

Extending the Proceeds of Peace and Development: European Union's Eastward Expansion and Development Cooperation with Africa by Cage Banseka (Adonis and Abbey Publishers, UK, 2006; 320 pp; pb $21.50, £21.50)

Paysage après le génocide: Une justice est-elle possible au Rwanda? by Jean Chatain (Le Temps des cerises, Pantin, France, 2007; 248 pp; pb €18)

Décentralisation et gouvernance locale au Sénégal: Quelle pertinence pour le développement local? by Djibril Diop (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2006; 268 pp; €24.50)

Elections en Guinée: Technologie électorale et imbroglio juridique by Togba Zogbelemou (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 238 pp; €21, FF138)

Avenir de l'industrie minière en Guinée by Ibrahima Soumah (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 258 pp; €25.50, FF148)

Violence in Developing Countries: War, Memory, Progress by Christopher Cramer (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, USA, 2007; 256 pp; pb $24.95)

The State of Resistance: Popular Struggles in the Global South by François Polet (Zed Books, London, UK, 2007; 176 pp; hb £60, pb £16.99, $31)

L'Afrique, le sens. Représentations, configurations, défigurations, ed. Michel Costantini (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2007; 224 pp; €21.50)

Wealth Effect: Africa in the Midst of Global Economic Transformation by Chamberlain S. Peterside (Lulu.Com, USA, 2007; 180 pp, pb $15.50)

Global Political Parties by Katarina Sehm Patomki and Marko Ulvila (Zed Books, London, UK, 2007; 176 pp; hb £55, pb £16.99)

AFRICA IN BRIEF

Measles deaths drop sharply in Africa

Measles deaths in Africa fell by a dramatic 91 per cent from 2000 to 2006, announced the Measles Initiative, a joint campaign by UN agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations in November. The drop in mortalities in Africa — from 396,000 to 36,000 — contributed greatly to an overall decline in measles deaths worldwide, from 757,000 to 242,000 over the same period. Most of the remaining deaths, about 178,000, are now in southern Asia.

"The dramatic drop in measles deaths in Africa and the strong progress made worldwide are a testament to the power of strong partnerships and the impact they can have on child survival," says UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Ann Veneman.

The Measles Initiative, run jointly by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the American Red Cross, the UN Foundation and the US Centres for Disease Control (CDC), oversaw mass vaccination campaigns in the 46 countries most affected by the disease. Thirty-one of those countries were in sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 478 million children aged 9 months to 14 years received the measles vaccine. "We literary [went] door-to-door informing, educating and motivating mothers and caregivers about the critical need to vaccinate their children," explains Bonnie McElveen-Hunter, chair of the American Red Cross. "These mobilization efforts [were] essential to our success."

WHO Director Margaret Chan calls the progress in Africa "a major public health success" and "a tribute to the commitment of countries in the African region." Dr. Chan adds: "We need to sustain this success and intensify our efforts in other parts of the world, as there are still far too many lives lost to this disease." ■

Trade talks reach impasse at Europe-Africa summit

A long-anticipated summit of European and African leaders vowed to build a new "strategic partnership" between the two regions, but ended mainly with general declarations and few concrete agreements. Some friction was generated by concerns over human rights issues, including the participation of the president of Zimbabwe, which prompted the UK prime minister to stay away from the 8–9 December summit in Lisbon, Portugal. But more notably, the European Union (EU) failed to convince African countries to accept new "free trade" accords.

Summarizing the African viewpoint, Alpha Oumar Konaré, chair of the Commission of the African Union, the continent's political organization, affirmed that Africa wants to participate in the global economy, including through expanded trade, "but with new rules."

UN / Paulo Filgueiras

Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade: The EU is trying to impose "a straitjacket that does not work."

The EU had originally pushed to negotiate the new accords, known as Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), by the end of December 2007, to comply with a deadline by the World Trade Organization to phase out preferential aid and trade pacts that Europe had maintained for some 30 years with its former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific (ACP). Since a majority of the 78 ACP countries are in Africa, the Lisbon summit was seen as an important step towards securing wider agreement.

But leading up to the year-end deadline, opposition to the EPAs by African governments, business groups and civil society organizations mounted (see *Africa Renewal*, July 2007). As proposed by the EU, the EPAs would have required ACP countries to liberalize most of their trade with the region in order to gain duty-free access to European markets. This would have allowed them to use tariffs to protect only a small portion of their own markets.

Noting that African industries are not yet able to compete with European products — some of which are heavily subsidized — Senegalese economist Moustapha Kassé warned on the eve of the Lisbon summit that the EPAs, if adopted, could lead to the "systematic dismantling of local production systems" and reduce African economies to little more than "bazaars."

Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade publicly declared several weeks before the summit that if he had to choose between more financial aid and protecting domestic industries from "destructive competition," he would choose protection. Moreover, he argued, an abrupt liberalization of African trade could in the short-run reduce African budgetary receipts by 35–70 per cent, since they are heavily dependent on tariff revenues. At the summit, he accused the EU of trying to impose "a straitjacket that does not work."

African leaders were also critical of the EU's bargaining methods. Rather than negotiating a new arrangement with the ACP group as a whole, EU officials sought separate deals with six different blocs — the Caribbean, Pacific and four sub-regions of Africa. Then when it seemed that none of those regional blocs would approve the EPAs, the EU pressed individual countries to sign "interim" trade agreements — or face a major hike in European tariffs against their goods at the start of the new year. By the time of the summit, 13 African countries had signed such interim arrangements. In Lisbon, Mr. Konaré criticized efforts to play African regions against each other and to "force" agreement on individual countries.

By the end of the summit, EU officials acknowledged that the original negotiating deadline would not be met. Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, agreed that talks "will require time" and hoped to resume discussions on the EPAs in February. Such a willingness by European leaders to discuss Africa's concerns, some observers pointed out, would be in the spirit of the summit's Lisbon Declaration, which promised the development of a "partnership of equals" between the two regions.

AFRICA WATCH

FOOD PRICES

Rising cereal costs hitting Africa's poor

Prices of food, particularly cereals, rose sharply in 2006 and in some cases have been increasingly at an even faster pace in 2007, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) warned in November. The UN agency says several factors will keep prices rising in coming years, including higher oil costs, the effects of climate change on agriculture and the greater use of maize and other cereals for producing bio-fuels, which has increased cereal demand. The higher prices, says Henri Josserand, head of FAO's early warning unit, are already causing "big problems of access for people in some West African countries this year."

The UN World Food Programme (WFP), which distributes food aid to vulnerable populations, has also drawn attention to the impact. "WFP's food costs have gone up 50 per cent in the last five years alone," reports WFP Director Josette Sheeran. "We're expecting over the next two years for that to go up another 35 per cent, but in some markets over the past six months we have had increases of over 40 per cent."

Higher global prices hit countries that depend on imports especially hard. Prices of rice, a staple in Guinea-Bissau, went up 40 per cent in 2007, compared with the year before. The cost of wheat in Senegal and Mauritania has gone up by 75 per cent, says the US-funded Famine Early Warning System Network.

The Senegalese government has responded by cutting import tariffs on wheat, but there was still a 12 per cent increase in the cost of bread between October and November alone. In Morocco similar hikes led to food protests in which 50 people were injured. Millers in Botswana have cited higher production costs, due mainly to the prices of imported oil and wheat, for increases in the price they must charge for maize meal and bread.

In the short-term, some African farmers may benefit, notes Ms. Sheeran. Increased demand has pushed up prices for alternative food crops, such as cassava. But there is a danger, she adds, that increased competition may lead to higher exports of such foods and make them unaffordable to poor people locally.

"With food prices at their highest level in decades, many people are simply being priced out of the food market," says Ms. Sheeran. "These problems are not given adequate attention in the West." ■

APPOINTMENTS

UN / Paulo Figueiras

The UN Secretary-General has appointed Ms. **Ellen Margrethe Løj**, Denmark's former UN ambassador, head of the UN Mission in Liberia. At the time of her appointment, she was serving as Denmark's ambassador to the Czech Republic. At the UN, Ms. Løj co-chaired the General Assembly's Working Committee on the Peacebuilding Commission in 2005. She also formerly chaired the Security Council's Sanctions Committee on Liberia.

Mr. **Alan Doss** of the UK has been named by the UN Secretary-General as his special representative in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Prior to this appointment, Mr. Doss served as special representative in Liberia from 2005 to 2007. He previously served as deputy special representative in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, among other positions.

UN / Eskinder Debebe

Mr. **Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah** of Mauritania has been appointed by the UN Secretary-General as his special representative for Somalia. From 2002 to 2007, Mr. Ould-Abdallah headed the UN Office in West Africa (UNOWA) and was chairman of the commission established to implement the International Court of Justice's ruling on the territorial dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria. Previously, he was the executive secretary of the Global Coalition for Africa, an advocacy group based in Washington, DC, and as Mauritania's minister of foreign affairs. The UN Secretary-General has temporarily assigned General Lamine Cissé of Senegal as officer-in-charge of UNOWA.

UN / Ky Chung

Mr. **Choi Young-jin** of the Republic of Korea has been appointed the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Côte d'Ivoire, replacing Mr. Pierre Schori of Sweden. Mr. Choi was previously his country's permanent representative to the UN and vice-minister of foreign affairs and trade. He has also served as UN assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping operations.

UN / Devra Berkowitz

Mr. **Ashraf Jehangir Qazi** of Pakistan has been appointed by the UN Secretary-General as his special representative for Sudan. Prior to this appointment, he served as UN special representative in Iraq. A former ambassador of Pakistan to the US, Mr. Qazi has also held various other diplomatic assignments, including in China, Japan, Egypt and Libya.

UN / Paulo Figueiras

The UN Secretary-General has appointed Mr. **François Lonsény Fall** of Guinea as his special representative and head of the UN Peace Building Office in the Central African Republic. Since 2005, he had been the special representative in Somalia. Mr. Fall was prime minister of Guinea in 2004 and served as minister for foreign affairs and cooperation from 2002 to 2004. He has also been his country's permanent representative to the UN in New York.

World Bank / S. D. McCourtie

Former Nigerian finance and foreign minister Ms. **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** has been appointed as the new managing director of the World Bank. Effective 1 December 2007, she will be responsible for the Bank's operations in Africa, South Asia, Europe and Central Asia, as well as for human resources. Prior to her ministerial career in Nigeria, Ms. Okonjo-Iweala was vice-president and corporate secretary of the World Bank Group.